

The VAH award, given by Washington, DC based Congressional Hunger Center is given to schools and local and statewide organizations that demonstrated success and creativity in "fighting hunger through developing and/or implementing local and state school meals wellness policies." HELP was chosen out of a field of 84 candidates nominated from throughout the United States by Members of Congress.

HELP is a community-based non-profit organization, based in Monterey County, which offers a wide range of private/public partnership intervention programs created to combat the rising obesity epidemic in the Monterey Bay Area. In only two years, HELP has established itself as a valued leader and collaborator in a well coordinated initiative to bring all school districts in the three county region of California's Central Coast to compliance with the School Wellness Policy mandate.

"HELP is a wonderful organization and we are proud of its pioneering work uniting private and public sectors for nutrition and wellness policy development and related programming. It is only natural that it should be recognized nationally," said Farr.

"HELP is putting into practice what many of us have been saying for years, that we should eat more of what we grow here on the Central Coast. Increased consumption of fresh produce can solve many of our chronic nutrition and health problems, and that starts in our schools," added Farr.

Dr. William Barr, Monterey County Superintendent of Schools, is a founding member of HELP's Community Leadership Council. HELP is taking the lead in coordinating the resources of nearly a dozen regional partners, ranging from health departments to school districts and community based organizations, to ensure coordinated support and technical assistance, as school districts in Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties begin to implement their Wellness policies.

Dr. Barr said "Healthy Eating Lifestyle Principles has not only developed and implemented a unique tri-county partnership strategy for cooperative Wellness Policy creation and dissemination. It has also provided a wide range of free human and material resources and technical assistance to 22 District Wellness Councils; and is now sponsoring with its partner agencies post-policy nutrition, farm to school and physical activity programs within our schools. Without HELP, our Districts would not be where they are today in adopting their new Wellness

Policies and launching curricular based support programs".

The state of California received four of the awards. The other awards went to organizations and school districts in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Sacramento.